

Middle Articles

WINCHESTER ADDRESS

On 31 May, after we had gone to press, His Eminence Cardinal Heenan, Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, was due to give the thirteenth Winchester Address of the B.M.A. in the New Hall of Winchester College. The Address is organized by the Winchester Division of the B.M.A. The following is a slightly shortened version of his address.

Freedom and Responsibility

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It is astonishing that despite appearances we are so little different from our grandparents. So much has happened during the life of the present generation that we expected to have become a race of supermen. But essentially man changes little with the generations, or, indeed, the centuries. There is no tale of horror that we have not improved on in our own time. In our complacency we allow ourselves to imagine that civilization has continued its uninterrupted progress with the march of man. We have always had a pathetic trust in the fruits of education. We have put every evil down to the lack of education. We have equated ignorance with sin. That is why we said that if only people could be given proper education crime would disappear.

Yet there has never been a more savage era than our own. We condescendingly talk about the Dark Ages but in some respects our own darkness is more impenetrable. Think again and again of what happened to the Jews in our day in a Christian country. There is no comparable story of inhumanity in the whole history of mankind. This particular sadism was the product of perverted politics and racial hatred. It was the nightmare world of the paranoid, and bears little relationship to what we like to regard as normal twentieth-century living.

Let us look at human freedom in order to see what limits, if any, should be imposed upon it. In recent years we have come to have a reverence for freedom which has led us to idolatry. Not all freedom is good. Only responsible freedom is good. It is because I want to challenge the proposition that all freedom must be good that I have coupled with freedom the idea of responsibility. But let me quickly prove that contention, so that we can go on to consider the more subtle problems of freedom and responsibility. It is simply not true to say, for example, that a man has the right to say exactly what he thinks. It depends on who the man is, what he wants to say, and to whom he wants to say it. The more responsible a man's position the less right he has to speak. This may sound paradoxical, but it is very clearly true. A schoolboy or an undergraduate may voice his opinion on any subject in the world, because no intelligent person takes the slightest notice of what he says. But a professor—especially if he is talking on his own subject—has the duty of being circumspect. What he says is accepted as authoritative. He can say what he wishes in the senior common room. He can express any views he likes on rugby football. But if he is, for example, a professor of medicine he has a moral obligation to express his views with great caution when lecturing to his students or writing in the press. Otherwise he may do positive harm to those who accept his views as authoritative and reliable.

Revolution, Anarchy—and Conformity

We live in an age of extraordinary conformity. I know that this is contrary to the popular view but I think it to be true. Ours is an era of revolution and anarchy. Young people are becoming more independent but this is because they are conformist. Each is doing whatever everybody else is doing. This is true of the boys and girls who shop in Carnaby Street. It is also true of students whose potential as agitators was recognized first by the dictators. I remember how fascists in Rome, Hitler Jugend in Berlin and young communists in Soviet Russia were regimented and made to demonstrate on all kinds of political occasion of whose significance they might have little or no knowledge. One day they were demanding the return of colonies; another day they were calling for the death penalty for alleged traitors on trial. Gradually the custom became world-wide. Young university students today willingly desert their books to sit down, lie down, take part in a teach-in or lock-out whenever persuaded that they are the torch-bearers of freedom.

People should not be free to destroy truth—though that is a very different thing from saying that people should not be free to attack what one group or political party or State or Church chooses to regard as truth. In this matter distinctions can be subtle. The limits of freedom and of truth are often far from clear. The history of your own profession abounds with examples of suppression of freedom which was in fact the suppression of truth. Sydney Smith once wrote—I hope facetiously—that Jenghiz Khan when most crimson with blood had never slaughtered the human race as they have been slaughtered by rash and erroneous theories of medicine. In fact the greatest names in medicine had to withstand persecution from their colleagues to proclaim truth. The opponents of Pasteur went to extraordinary lengths. Vast sums of money were collected in the anti-microbe crusade. Yet Lister was able to say to Pasteur at his silver jubilee that medical science owed more to him than to anyone in the whole world. Joseph Lister could speak with feeling because he too had been vilified when he introduced antiseptics into surgery.

When we see what humanity might have lost through the bigotry of conservatives we are made doubly suspicious of any attack on academic freedom. Even in our own day a great country made itself look foolish through political interference with research. The father of modern biology was a monk who did all his experiments in his monastery garden in Moravia. It is difficult to credit that he died so recently as 1884. Mendel, Weismann, and Morgan were the three great names in biology

until Lysenko. He discovered that biologists clung to Mendelism through their senseless hostility to Marxist dogma. The controversy was not over genes and chromosomes but freedom of scholarship and political dogmatism. It is true that Lysenko was one of Stalin's pets and that Stalin is now dead. But a new Stalin can arise in Russia, China, Germany, or in the U.S.A. or Great Britain. We therefore need to look at this example from the very recent past if only as a cautionary tale.

Lysenko's theories were founded on the experiments of Michurin. I give you Lysenko's own words from page 25 vol. 1 of his *Soviet Biology*:

"His studies and investigations led I. V. Michurin to the following important conclusion: it is possible, with man's intervention, to force any form of animal or plant to change more quickly and in a direction desirable to man. . . . Soviet biologists hold that the Michurin principles are the only scientific principles. The Weismannists and their followers, who deny the heritability of acquired characters, are not worth dwelling on at too great length. The future belongs to Michurin. . . . By ridding our science of Mendelism-Morganism-Weismannism we will expel fortuities from biological science."

We need to be in no doubt about the real inspiration of Soviet scientific theory. The School of Agriculture, Cambridge, has published a verbatim report of the session of the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences which discussed Lysenko's views. From it I take the second of two quotations, which require no comment from me. The first is from Lysenko vol. 1, at page 50:

"Long live the Party of Lenin and Stalin which discovered Michurin for the world and created all the conditions for the progress of advanced materialist biology in our country. Glory to the great friend and protagonist of science, our leader and teacher, Comrade Stalin."

The second is from page 183 of the verbatim report:

"The new theory of agronomics was evolved by our Soviet scientists. Their works are the highest achievements of thought in the sphere of agronomics. Comrade Stalin, the greatest scientist of our day, gave us the guiding line in this matter."

No one knows better than doctors the dangers of false biology. But all true science must be defended against politicians, the press, the arts, and, if necessary, also the Church. Doctors must defend academic freedom but at the same time it is their duty not to deny its primacy to truth. Doctors in this country are socially more important today than ever before. It was not until the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century that laymen as a body interested themselves in learning. In mediaeval times the priest was the only educated man in town. He was the person of the town—or, to use the old pronunciation, the parson of the town. To him everyone went for advice of every kind. The Benefit of the Clergy, which exempted a man from imprisonment or death on a first conviction, was not primarily a privilege for priests. It was given to clergy not by reason of their sacred calling but because they could read. Their number was so small that society could not afford to kill off its few readers. You may recall that Ben Jonson, who was most unclerical, was saved from execution by pleading Benefit of the Clergy.

The New Clergy

You are the new clergy. Modern Englishmen go to church to see their friends married and their friends and enemies buried. Apart from that they have little contact with clergy. That is why I say that you—and especially the general practitioners among you—are the modern priests. That is an added

reason why you must have a delicate respect for truth. For you will often be people's guide in spiritual and ethical matters as well as in medicine. You must therefore have a philosophy or at least a system of ethics. I am not suggesting that it will be the same as mine. In the matter of contraception and sterilization, for example, it seems clear that wise and honest men may well disagree with the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church. But there are other medico-moral matters upon which I believe that the old principles are true and the new are false. Many today deny that the unborn child is a person. Others deny that the incurably sick have the right to live. I refer to abortion and euthanasia not particularly because they are of topical interest but because they serve as examples of where freedom and truth may come in conflict.

It is taken for granted in many circles—but by no means in all medical circles—that liberalizing laws on abortion are in the best sense of the word progressive. It is assumed that the liberty of the subject requires a woman to be allowed to have a living foetus removed just as readily as a bad tooth or a varicose vein. There is no thought whatever of the rights of the foetus and still less of the rights of the Author of life. Many laymen who advocate easier abortion imagine doctors daily faced with the terrible dilemma of whether to save the mother or child. In the last century craniotomy was a common practice. Today it is almost unheard of. Reformers really accept as a principle that human dignity and freedom demand the right to abortion at choice. However cleverly disguised by legal phrases, the new Abortion Bill is a licence for abortion on demand. The rights of the living foetus have been almost completely ignored by the reformers.

When, therefore, a paragraph in a recent *Daily Telegraph* caught my eye I was fascinated. It was a report of a ruling given on 28 April 1967 by the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, U.S.A. The case involved a baby born prematurely in 1964 after its mother was injured in a car accident. The baby weighed only two pounds and lived only two hours. The family had made a claim for damages against the lorry driver responsible for the accident on the grounds that it caused the loss of the foetus, which through premature birth was denied its human rights. The Lower Court had denied this claim. The Supreme Court upheld it, declaring that *as a foetus is capable of independent life it must be regarded as a person*. I shall not consider further the ethics of abortion. I cite this case merely to suggest that those who uphold the rights of an unborn child are not necessarily reactionary or opposed to human freedom.

I end by repeating that doctors are the new clergy. Science has displaced religion in the minds of many. You and I know that there need never be conflict between the priests of science and religion. But most of those with whom you deal will not have had your educational opportunities. They may think that they must choose between the two. Because you will often have the responsibility of counselling them in their moral and social life as well as in matters of health you must be on your guard. You must never attempt to destroy the faith of your patients nor present theories as established facts. The delicate balance between freedom and responsibility will remain with you all your professional lives. You can do no more than strive to preserve your integrity. Humility is the basis of all Christian virtue. It is also the foundation of scientific progress. It would not be in order to end with a text of scripture, but I may be forgiven for quoting two lines of Cowper which seem to be relevant:

"Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much
Wisdom is humble that he knows no more."